

IN THE CLAIMS

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

1. (currently amended) A method for connecting a plurality of customers sharing a common interest and using a domain accessible through a communications network, each of said plurality having a billing address and an account associated with ~~the same~~ a service provider, said service provider communicatively linked to said domain, said method comprising:

notifying said each of said plurality about said domain by including information in ~~its respective~~ a billing statement for said each of said plurality;

providing said each of said plurality with access to said domain; and

allowing at least a subset of said plurality of customers to communicate with each other using said domain while not disclosing true identity of each customer of said subset to others of said plurality by randomly associating, through operation of a server, said true identity of said each customer of said subset with a respective alias, said alias being made available to others of said subset to identify respective ones of said subset.

2. (original) The method of claim 1 wherein said notifying further includes mailing said billing statement to each of said plurality.

3. (original) The method of claim 2 wherein said notifying further includes providing said plurality with a universal resource locator (URL), said URL for allowing said plurality access to said domain.
4. (original) The method of claim 1 wherein said access means includes a server associated with a URL and made available to said plurality of customers, said server facilitating access to said domain by said plurality.
5. (original) The method of claim 1 wherein said addresses are used in establishing said subset of said plurality.
6. (original) The method of claim 1 wherein said domain is only accessible to those of said plurality sharing said common interest.
7. (original) The method of claim 6 wherein said providing further requires that said each of said plurality enter a password to gain access to said domain.
8. (canceled)
9. (currently amended) A system for allowing a plurality of customers sharing a common interest to communicate over a network, said system comprising:
a service provider having an account with each of said plurality;

a domain associated with said service provider for allowing said each of said plurality to communicate with each other;

billing means controlled by said service provider for invoicing each said account;

notification means associated with said billing means for informing said each of said plurality about said domain; and

a server associated with said domain for allowing said each of said plurality to access said domain upon authentication,

wherein said server further comprises:

authentication means for allowing at least one of said plurality to establish its identity; and

associating means for mapping said identity to an alias randomly-generated and chosen by said server and associated with said at least one of said plurality, said alias being made available to other of said plurality having access to said domain, said alias further concealing true identity of said at least one of said plurality.

10. (currently amended) The system of claim 9 wherein said server further comprises:

~~authentication means for allowing at least one of said plurality to establish its identity;~~

~~associating means for mapping said identity to an alias associated with said at least one of said plurality, said alias being made available to other of said plurality having access to said domain, said alias further concealing true identity of said at least one of said plurality;~~

storage means for archiving said domain and information about said at least one of said plurality and said other of said plurality having access to said domain; and

interaction means for allowing said other of said plurality having access to said domain to communicate with each other and with said at least one of said plurality using their respective aliases.

11. (original) A computer-readable medium containing a plurality of instructions that, when executed by at least one processor, causes said at least one processor to perform a method for inter-connecting through a communications network a plurality of customers who are associated with a service provider and share a common interest, said method comprising:

allowing said plurality of customers to have access to a domain associated with said service provider;

accepting data from at least one of said plurality of customers,

verifying a true identity of said at least one of said plurality of customers based upon at least a portion of said data;

mapping said true identity to an alias associated with said at least one of said plurality of customers; and

allowing others of said plurality of customers with access to said domain to have access only to said alias while keeping said true identity in confidence.

12. (original) The method of claim 11 further comprising:

notifying said plurality of customers about said domain by including information in a billing statement associated with said service provider.

13. (original) The method of claim 11 further including storing said domain and information about those of said plurality of customers having access to said domain.

14. (original) The method of claim 11 wherein said allowing includes a server coupled to said communications network.

15. (original) The method of claim 14 wherein said at least one of said plurality of customers uses a web browser to access said domain.

16. (original) A data display for displaying information about a domain to a customer associated with a service provider, said customer having been notified about an address associated with said domain by said service provider by way of a billing statement, said domain being made available to said customer for facilitating communication with persons having a common interest with said customer, said data display comprising:

a logon field for receiving input data from said customer, said input data for establishing an identity of said customer;

an alias field for displaying an alias associated with said customer, said alias further being made available to persons having access to said domain and sharing said common interest with said customer; and

a selection field for allowing said customer to choose a topic of interest, said topic of interest being linked to at least a subset of said persons sharing said common interest with said customer.

17. (currently amended) A method for enabling each customer in a plurality of customers of a service provider to determine if other customers in said plurality have one or more interests in common with said each customer and to anonymously communicate over a network with certain of said other customers having said interests in common, said method comprising:

notifying said each customer by way of its respective billing statement from said service provider about a common domain in said network over which anonymous communication may take place; and

providing said each customer with access to said domain and access to information about said interests of said other customers to permit said anonymous communication between said each customer and said certain of said other customers, said anonymous communication resulting from a like plurality of aliases each generated randomly by a server for, respectively, a different one of said plurality of customers, whereby said each customer knows said aliases and not true identities of said certain of said other customers.